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Books into Miniseries—II: The Glory and the Agony
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Publishers Weekly

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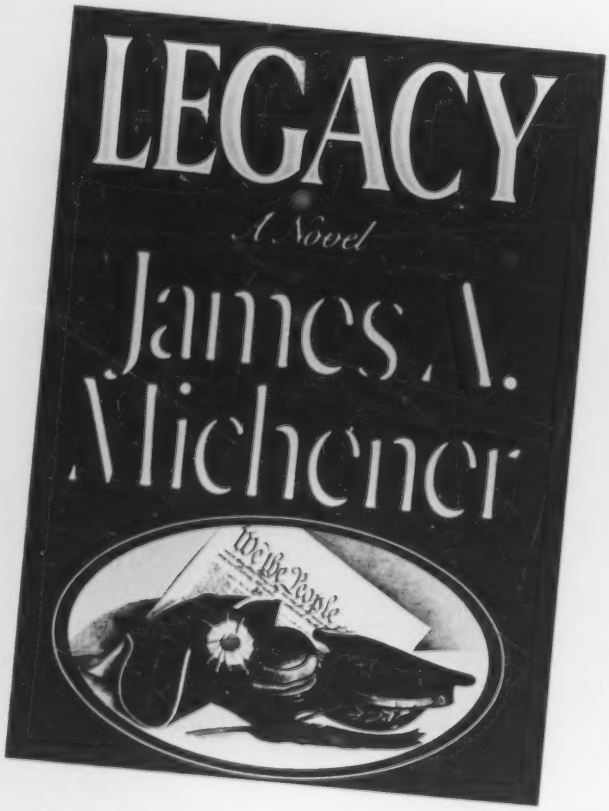

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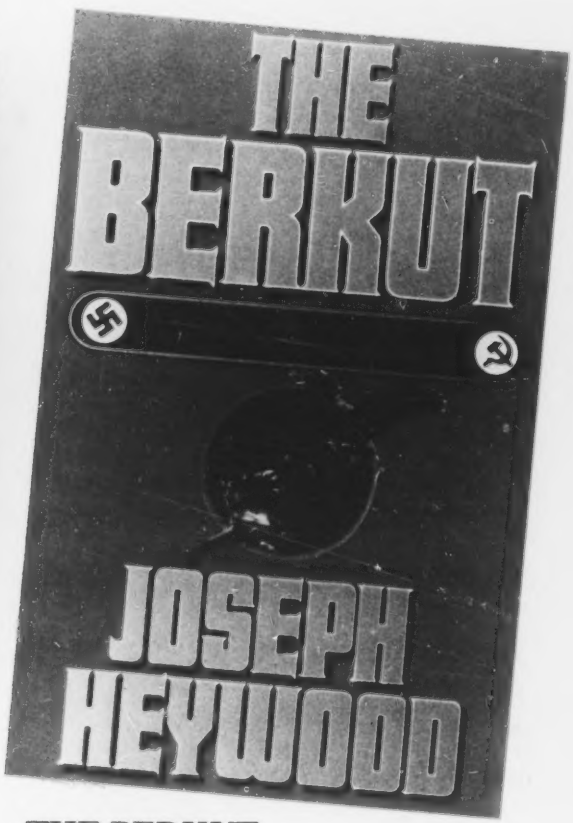

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FEATURE

Tube Power 49

If all goes well, a TV version of a book can mean big sales, a boost to backlist, a second life for a paperback; if not, forget it *by Lisa See*

DEPARTMENTS

NEWS OF THE WEEK 23

Maxwell Sues to Block HBJ's $3 Billion Plan

Who Sits on HBJ's Board

Butterworths to Buy K. G. Saur

Cross Currents

Octopus Group Acquires Mitchell Beazley

Publishers Fight Proposed Law to Tax Interstate Sales

Will Publishers Resist Dalton's Costly New Television Ads?

Congress Is Uninterested in Examining Industry Consolidation

Stock Exchange Chairman Levitt Buys Interest in UPA

Master Is CVBC Group Head, Random House V-P

Authors Hail Tax Decision Allowing Them to Deduct Expenses Currently

Obituary Notes: Tobi Sanders, Ann Stuart Taylor, Murray Mindlin, William W. Vickery

TRADE NEWS 39

Paperback Books:

Fireside Signs Spike Lee to Two-Book Contract

Atlantic Launches Two Series at ABA Convention

African Safari Guide from New Florida Publisher

Hardcover Books:

August House Starts American Folklore Series This Fall

Summit, Pocket Acquire Duo's Book on Binghams

Back to Press

BOOKSELLING & MERCHANDISING 63

To Catch a Thief—What Some Booksellers Do: No system is perfect, but booksellers agree that an alert staff is the best deterrent

AUDIO/VIDEO PLUS 66

AV Products on the Move: A PW survey of independent booksellers finds that audio and video growth isn't limited to the national chains

PW INTERVIEWS 69

Frederic Morton

FORECASTS 71

Fiction 71

Nonfiction 75

Paperbacks 79

Children's Books 82

COLUMNS

Highlights 15

Letters 16

Calendar 16

Editorial 18

Midwest View 32

International Front 34

Rights 68

Weekly Exchange 90

Paperback Bestsellers 96

Hardcover Bestsellers 98

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EDITED BY TOM SPAIN

AV Products on the Move

A PW survey of independent booksellers finds that audio and video growth isn't limited to the national chains

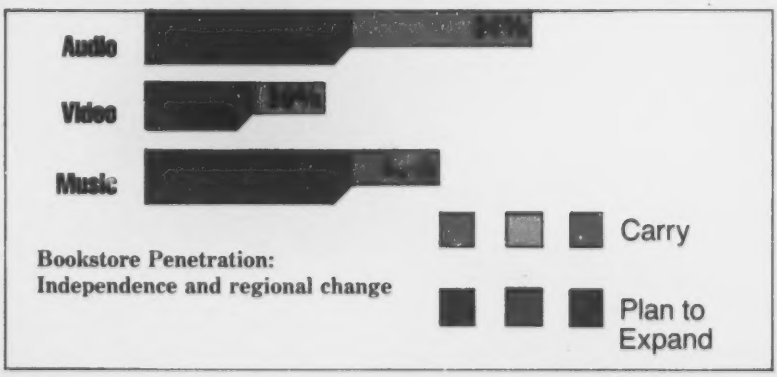
The coming season will bring a deeper commitment to audio and video products from retailers currently stocking them, a new *PW* survey reports. The overwhelming majority of booksellers who have introduced spoken audio, video and music cassettes into their stores plan to maintain or increase inventory levels of those categories in the next year, with expansion the byword for most; only a handful (8% for video, under 5% for spoken audio and music) intend to reduce their cassette inventory.

The survey, conducted for *PW* by Cahners Research, is based on a nationally representative sample of 300 independent and regional chain booksellers.

According to the survey, about two-thirds of the retailers canvassed are selling spoken audio titles, usually for two years or less. Music is in fewer stores—roughly half the sample—but it has been around longer, usually for three or more years. Videocassettes, on the other hand, are a relatively recent arrival, introduced in the last year in over half of the stores that carry video, which represent about 30% of the overall sample. While the 30% figure may seem high, it is in keeping with the Gallup survey reported in *PW* last year (Oct. 17, 1986), which found video in 17% of independent bookstores, with another 10% planning to add video to their stores by summer 1987.

Despite their novelty, both audio and video are carrying their weight for many retailers. Forty percent of the retailers carrying audio report that spoken audio sales are growing as fast or faster than their overall business, a figure that rises to 49% when audio sales are compared only to nonbook sales. The video sales growth rate equals or surpasses the overall store growth in one-third of the video-carrying respondents (slightly more when compared to nonbook sales). Overall, however, music earns the highest marks from retailers. When asked to characterize category sales as either impressive, merely satisfactory, or disappointing, a 60% majority of booksellers carrying music awarded top honors to music, a rating given to spoken audio by 28% of the audio retailers and to video by 16%.

As for future growth among retailers who are not currently marketing cassettes, spoken audio seems to be the category most likely to attract new retailers. Among those booksellers who are *not* carrying spoken audio, 42% report that they would consider the category in the future; music is considered a possible add-on by one-quarter of the stores that don't sell music tapes. Video inspires the most resistance among booksellers: only 11% of the booksellers who are not carrying video say that they would consider it in the future. This "wall" may not be an impenetrable one, however, as a majority (60%) of booksellers who say they will not carry video attribute their decision to an unwillingness to compete with video stores. If booksellers can be convinced that most video stores do very little sales business on top of their rental programs, and frequently offer only a narrow selection of sales-priced titles that does not include a wide variety of subject areas that could thrive in the bookstore environment, the booksellers' hesitation could be alleviated. Profit margins—perceived as a major sticking point for booksellers—are cited as a deterrent from video sales by only 17% of the booksellers saying no to video, an indication of both the deepening margins offered by video publishers and the growing recognition of the differences between video and book business economies.



Bookstore Penetration: Independence and regional change

Audio Picks

What does the typical involvement in audio constitute for booksellers? Retailers carry on average an inventory of about 80 spoken audio titles (up from 55 in 1985), with a total of about 118 units (compared to 80 in 85). The average projected inventory expansion (in terms of titles) is 12%, although a majority plan to increase their inventory by only 10% or less. Most (59%) display audio exclusively in a section they have created for it, although another 31% shelve audiocassettes both in their own section and with the books to which they are related; the remaining 10% display it only with related books.

Children's book-and-cassette packages are the most frequently carried category of audio, in 79% of the stores carrying audio, as well as the category most often targeted for increase; a complete break-down of category frequency and expansion plans is illustrated in the chart at right. When choosing their audio titles, retailers place the most importance on the reputation of the author of the tape, followed closely by the sales performance of the book on which it is based, then (in order) price, reader reputation, packaging, and abridgement status. The proximity of the audio publication date to the release of the book—a time gap that publishers are currently striving to narrow—is the second least important factor to the respondents, who assign less importance

***Categories That Sell**—Which categories of audio and video products do booksellers sell? The charts at right show which categories are most frequently carried, and which are most likely to be expanded. The percentages reflect the proportion of stores currently selling each of the overall media formats (audio, video and music) that carry and plan to expand each particular category*

only to the publisher's reputation (among the criteria mentioned in the survey). Regarding price, retailers report on average that approximately $7 is the most effective price point for one-cassette packages, and about $13 for two-tape titles.

Video Favorites

Booksellers are very selective about the video titles that they carry; two-thirds carry fewer than than 50 titles and have fewer than 50 units on hand. Their expansion plans are more ambitious than those for audio, however, averaging out to a 21% increase in the number of video titles in stock; a slight majority (53%) will expand their video selection by 10% or less. Children's video is the most frequently carried category; the chart at right outlines the most frequently carried category, and retailers' expansion plans for each.

Booksellers report that margins and returns policies are more influential selling points than either product reviews or book tie-ins; only price was considered more important, with $15–$20 the most acceptable price range for adult product, and $10–$15 for children's.

Sounds of Music

The bookstore prevalence of the cassette format for music, and the rapid acceptance of the compact disc at the expense of the standard LP, mirror changes occurring simultaneously in the nation's record stores; a comparison of the three formats' status in bookstores is in the chart at right. What's on these tapes and discs? Children's music is the most frequently carried style of music, appearing in 57% of the stores with music inventory. Classical is a close second, in 56% of the stores. New Age, a newcomer to the bookstore market, is already in 38% of the stores handling music, followed by jazz (33%) and pop (16%). □